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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted in the Virginia Community College System (VCCS) to determine the retention rates and academic achievement of part-time, degree-seeking students. The enrollment files of the VCCS colleges were examined to identify each individual enrolled in the fall quarters between 1985 and 1987, to determine full-/part-time enrollment status for each student, and to tabulate the number of productive and non-productive grades earned. Enrollment files for the following spring quarters were checked to determine whether the student was still enrolled. Study findings included the following: (1) the three-year average retention rate for part-time, degree-seeking students at the 23 community colleges in the VCCS was 48%, compared to a systemwide average of 78% for full-time students and 28% for part-time, non-degree-seeking students; (2) between 1985-86 and 1987-88, eight colleges showed a decrease in the retention rate of part-time, degree-seeking students, while 15 colleges and the system as a whole showed improved retention rates; (3) larger colleges in the system tended to have lower retention rates than smaller colleges; (4) the percentage of productive grades did not correlate with the retention rates of part-time degree students; and (5) colleges that had high retention and high rates of productive grades among full-time students also tended to have high retention and high rates of productive grades among part-time, degree-seeking students. Appendixes provides graphs and tables. (AAC)

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RETENTION OF PART-TIME DEGREE STUDENTS IN THE VIRGINIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM

1985-86 through 1987-88

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February 26, 1989

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AL 890 123

Retention of Part-Time Degree Students In the Virginia Community College System 1985-86 through 1987-88

Introduction

This is an extension of the study of the retention of Virginia Community College students discussed in a recent paper by the author.¹ The focus of the earlier paper was on the retention of full-time degree students and part-time non-curricular students. These categories were selected for the initial study because they represented two extremes in the continuum of community college students. Full-time degree students tend to be like "regular" college students. There is a reasonable presumption that students in this category who enrolled in the Fall Quarter intended to remain enrolled throughout the academic year. Conversely, part-time non-curricular students typically come to the community college with very limited objectives. Often the completion of a single course satisfies the immediate educational objectives of the student.

Part-time degree students represent an intermediate group of community college students. These students have declared their intention to complete a two-year associate degree program. They typically take roughly one-third the load of an average full-time student. Almost all are employed, or are homemakers, or both.

The retention to the Spring Quarter of part-time degree students enrolled in the 1985, 1986, and 1987 Fall Quarters is considered in this paper.

¹Don Puyear, "Student Retention in the VCCS—Academic Years 1985-86 through 1987-88" (Richmond: Virginia Community College System, January, 1989).

PROCEDURE AND LIMITATIONS

The same procedure was used as in the previous study. The enrollment files of each college were addressed to identify each individual enrolled in the Fall Quarter, along with that individual's enrollment category.² The college's enrollment files for the following Spring Quarter were then checked to determine if that individual was present. The number of productive and nonproductive grades³ earned by each student in the Fall Quarter was also tabulated. The methodology did not verify that the individual remained in the same enrollment category in subsequent quarters and no distinction was made between new students and returning students nor between freshman and sophomore students.

Observations

The results of the investigation with respect to part-time degree students is compared and contrasted with the corresponding result for full-time degree students and for part-time non-curricular students.

Retention Rates

The three-year average retention rates for part-time degree students at the 23 community colleges in the VCCS ranged from 65% to 33%, and the average for the system as a whole was 48%. This compares with a range of from 84% to 63% (system

²The enrollment categories are full-time and part-time. Subcategories within each of these categories are non-curricular, developmental, university-parallel, occupational-technical degree, and non-degree. This paper focuses on the combined data for part-time university-parallel and occupational-technical degree students.

³A, "B," "C," "S," and "P" grades were considered to productive grades since they represent the successful completion of a course. "D," "F," "U," "R," "I," and "W" grades were considered to be nonproductive since they do not represent the successful completion of a course notwithstanding the fact that some of these grades do not connote unsatisfactory progress or failure.

average = 78%) for full-time degree students and a range of from 63%⁴ to 13% (system average = 28%) for part-time non-curricular students. These results are about what one would expect. Part-time degree students are more likely to drop out than full-time degree students. Conversely, students enrolled in a curriculum (whether full-time or part-time) are more likely to return than students who have not committed themselves to a goal of degree completion.

Changes in Retention Rates

Between the 1985-86 and the 1987-88 academic years, 8 colleges showed a decrease in the retention rate of part-time degree students, 15 colleges and the system as a whole showed an increase. The changes ranged from a decrease of 10% to an increase of 15%. The retention rate for the system increased 2%. The figures for full-time degree students are quite similar to those cited above: 15 colleges and the system as a whole showed an increase. The changes ranges from a decrease of 4% to an increase of 8%, with the rate for the system as a whole increasing 2%. In contrast, for part-time non-curricular student retention, 12 colleges showed a decrease, 11 showed an increase, and the system as a whole remained essentially constant. The changes (other than the anomaly noted before) ranged from a decrease of 15% to an increase of 9%.

Thus, the retention rates for part-time degree students changed in a manner similar to that for full-time degree students. In both cases the preponderance of colleges and the system as a whole showed an increase in retention rates over the three-year period.

⁴This rate appears to be an anomaly. The next lower rate was 38%, which is more in keeping with the rest of the data.

Factors Affecting Retention Rates

College size and student success as measured by the proportion of productive grades in the Fall Quarter were investigated in the earlier paper as potential factors affecting student retention.

College Size. There is a clear, statistically significant, tendency for the larger colleges in the system to have lower retention rates for part-time degree students. Nonetheless, the lowest retention rates were found among some of the smaller colleges in the system. A similar tendency for larger colleges to have lower retention rates, but with the lowest rates to be found at some of the smaller colleges, was found in the case of full-time degree students. That tendency was not, however, statistically significant. College size did not appear to have any affect on the retention of part-time non-curricular students.

Productive Grades. The percentage of productive grades did not correlate with the retention rates of part-time degree students. This contrasts with the dramatic and highly significant correlation between productive grades and retention of full-time degree students but is consistent with the lack of correlation between productive grades and the retention of part-time non-curricular students.

Relationship Between Full-Time Degree Student Retention and Part-Time Degree Student Retention

There is a highly significant correlation between the retention of full-time degree students and the retention of part-time degree students. Colleges that did well with one group also did well with the other. The retention rates of full-time degree students was, however, consistently higher than the retention rates of part-time degree students.

This correlation of retention rates suggests that there are underlying characteristics in the college or in the community that tend to enhance or diminish the likelihood of retention and that these characteristics affect both full-time and part-time students. While this type of study cannot identify what those characteristics are, it can demonstrate that they exist.

Relationship Between Productive Grades Received by Full-Time and Part-Time Degree Students

As in the retention rates of full-time and part-time degree students there is a clear, highly significant correlation between the percentage of productive grades received by full-time degree students and the percentage of productive grades received by part-time degree students. The percentage of productive grades received by part-time degree students was, however, slightly higher than those received by full-time degree students.

Conclusions and Recommendations

As one might expect, the retention of part-time degree students fits a pattern that is intermediate between that of full-time degree students and part-time non-curricular students.

- The retention rates of part-time degree students are lower than for full-time degree students but higher than for part-time non-curricular students.
- Colleges that have high retention of full-time degree students also tend to have high retention of part-time degree students, and vice-versa.
- Likewise, colleges that have high rates of productive grades for full-time degree students also have relatively high rates of productive grades for part-time degree students.

- Larger colleges have a clear disadvantage in student retention. The danger of losing the student in the throng must be recognized and vigorous strategies must be implemented to address this danger.
- Factors other than student success as measured by productive grades determine part-time degree student retention. The fact that the percentage of productive grades is somewhat higher for part-time degree students than for their full-time counterparts and the likelihood that factors external to the college experience affect the decision of part-time degree students to persist may combine to explain the lack of correlation between productive grades and retention for this group when the relationship was so strong for full-time degree students.

While this study does not give any clear-cut answers to what a college should do to improve the retention of part-time degree students, there is a strong indication that good retention programs will affect part-time degree student in the same way, but perhaps not to the same extent, as full-time degree students.

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February, 1989

Data and Graphs

VCCS 1985-86		FALL ENROLL	WINTER RETENTION	F - W %	SPRING RETENTION	W - S %	F - S %	F QTR PROD CR
PART-TIME								%
Non-Curr & Dev	41,239	16,041	38.9%	12,166	75.8%	29.5%	82.1%	
Non-Degree	5,989	2,635	44.0%	2,037	77.3%	34.0%	85.0%	
Degree	35,491	20,191	56.9%	16,659	82.5%	46.9%	79.6%	
Total	82,719	38,867	47.0%	30,862	79.4%	37.3%	81.5%	
FULL-TIME								
Non-Curr & Dev	5,396	4,148	76.9%	3,462	83.5%	64.2%	65.9%	
Non-Degree	2,540	2,015	79.3%	1,682	83.5%	66.2%	73.6%	
Degree	17,840	14,925	83.7%	13,292	89.1%	74.5%	76.5%	
Total	25,776	21,088	81.8%	18,436	87.4%	71.5%	74.5%	
GRAND TOTAL	108,495	59,955	55.3%	49,298	82.2%	45.4%	77.5%	

VCCS 1986-87		FALL ENROLL	WINTER RETENTION	F - W %	SPRING RETENTION	W - S %	F - S %	F QTR PROD CR
PART-TIME								%
Non-Curr & Dev	47,689	18,129	38.0%	13,516	74.6%	28.3%	82.6%	
Non-Degree	6,045	2,985	49.4%	2,432	81.5%	40.2%	81.3%	
Degree	35,841	20,678	57.7%	17,191	83.1%	48.0%	79.2%	
Total	89,575	41,792	46.7%	33,139	79.3%	37.0%	81.2%	
FULL-TIME								
Non-Curr & Dev	5,967	4,574	76.7%	3,864	84.5%	64.8%	66.4%	
Non-Degree	2,662	1,999	75.1%	1,709	85.5%	64.2%	75.0%	
Degree	18,650	15,687	84.1%	14,053	89.6%	75.4%	75.6%	
Total	27,279	22,260	81.6%	19,626	88.2%	71.9%	74.3%	
GRAND TOTAL	116,854	64,052	54.8%	52,765	82.4%	45.2%	77.4%	

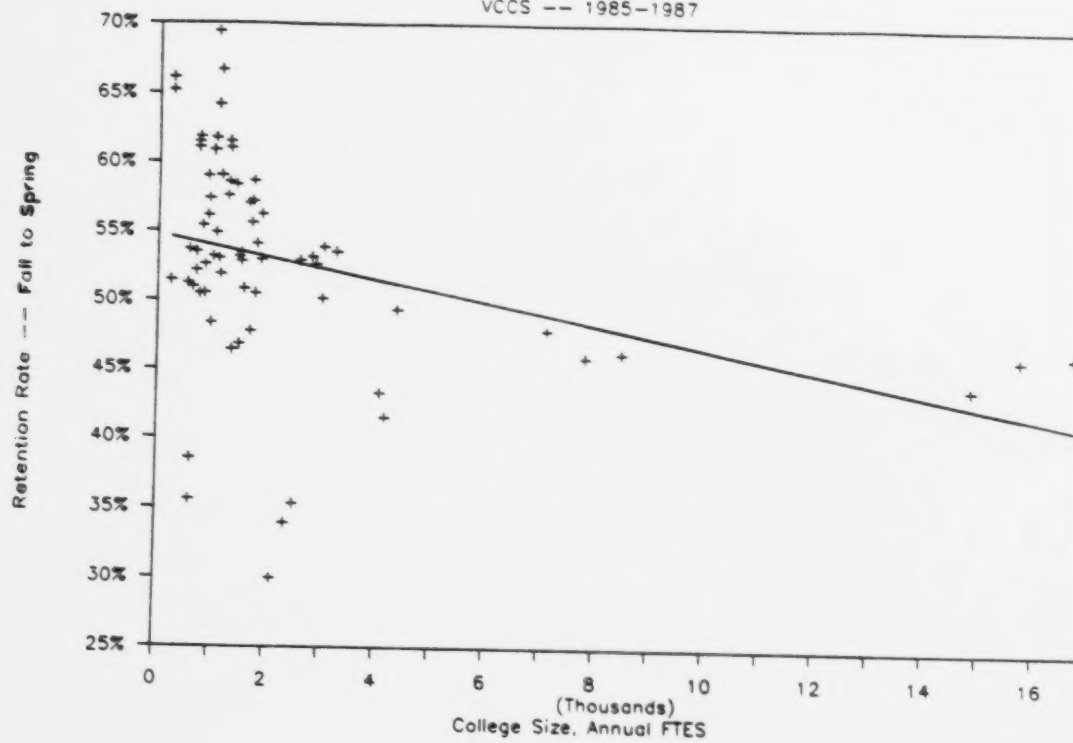
VCCS 1987-88		FALL ENROLL	WINTER RETENTION	F - W %	SPRING RETENTION	W - S %	F - S %	F QTR PROD CR
PART-TIME								%
Non-Curr & Dev	48,528	18,397	37.9%	14,029	76.3%	28.9%	80.1%	
Non-Degree	7,086	3,220	45.4%	2,368	79.8%	36.2%	81.8%	
Degree	37,585	22,018	58.6%	18,260	82.9%	48.6%	76.3%	
Total	93,199	43,635	46.8%	34,857	79.9%	37.4%	78.7%	
FULL-TIME								
Non-Curr & Dev	6,976	5,408	77.5%	4,638	85.8%	66.5%	64.8%	
Non-Degree	2,634	1,930	73.3%	1,669	86.5%	63.4%	76.3%	
Degree	20,277	17,247	85.1%	15,513	89.9%	76.5%	74.6%	
Total	29,887	24,585	82.3%	21,820	88.8%	73.0%	72.9%	
GRAND TOTAL	123,086	68,220	55.4%	56,677	83.1%	46.0%	75.7%	

VCCS

	-----FALL QUARTER 1985-----				-----FALL QUARTER 1986-----				-----FALL QUARTER 1987-----			
	--PRODUCTIVE--		---NON-PROD---		--PRODUCTIVE--		---NON-PROD---		--PRODUCTIVE--		---NON-PROD---	
	NUMBER	%	NUMBER	%	NUMBER	%	NUMBER	%	NUMBER	%	NUMBER	%
PART-TIME												
Non-Curr & Dev	17,668	82.1%	3,841	17.9%	24,760	82.6%	5,213	17.4%	38,790	80.1%	9,611	19.9%
Non-Degree	4,089	85.0%	721	15.0%	4,373	81.3%	1,008	18.7%	8,118	81.8%	1,805	18.2%
Degree	13,126	79.6%	3,358	20.4%	15,961	79.2%	4,187	20.8%	31,751	76.3%	9,877	23.7%
Total	34,883	81.5%	7,920	18.5%	45,094	81.2%	10,408	18.8%	78,659	78.7%	21,293	21.3%
FULL-TIME												
Non-Curr & Dev	5,292	65.9%	2,735	34.1%	6,034	66.4%	3,059	33.6%	12,790	64.8%	6,951	35.2%
Non-Degree	6,736	73.6%	2,420	26.4%	7,642	75.0%	2,542	25.0%	10,065	76.3%	3,127	23.7%
Degree	29,188	76.5%	8,980	23.5%	35,508	75.6%	11,449	24.4%	54,055	74.6%	18,445	25.4%
Total	41,216	74.5%	14,135	25.5%	49,184	74.3%	17,050	25.7%	76,910	72.9%	28,523	27.1%
GRAND TOTAL	76,099	77.9%	22,055	22.5%	94,278	77.4%	27,458	22.6%	155,569	75.7%	49,816	24.3%

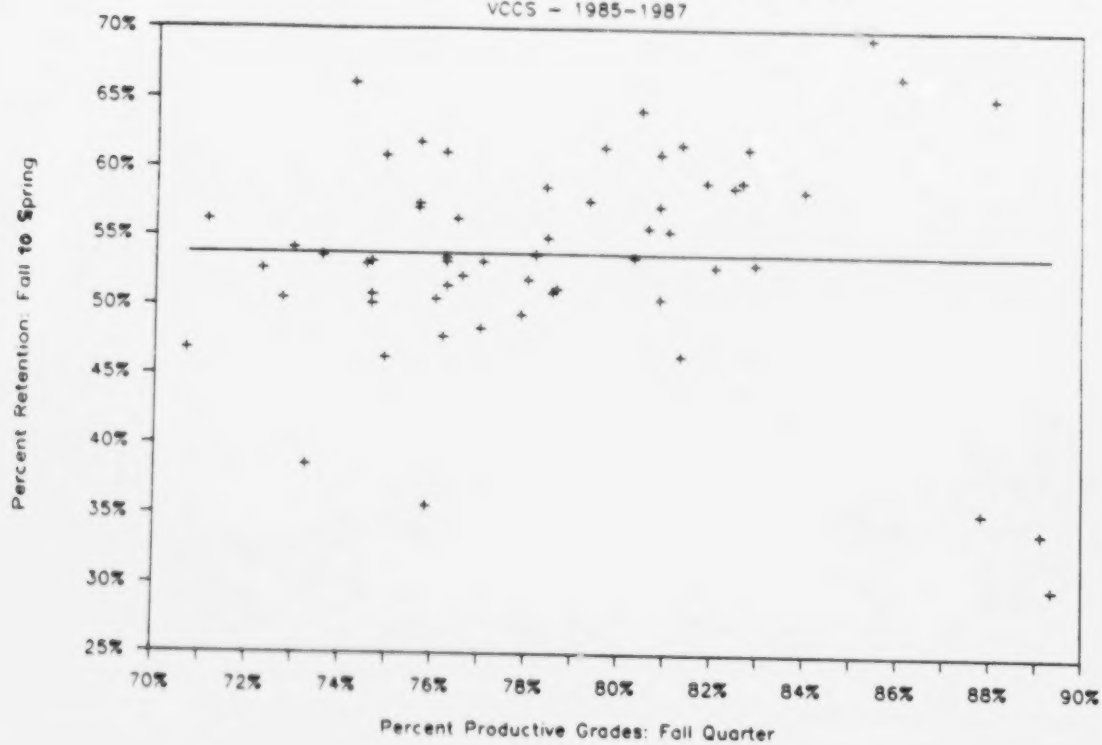
Part-Time Degree Students

VCCS -- 1985-1987



Part-Time Degree Students

VCCS - 1985-1987



VCCS - 1985-1987



Degree Student Productive Grades

VCCS -- 1985-1987

